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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/05/2039 TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [KDEM](#) [ECON](#) [AR](#)

SUBJECT: ARGENTINA'S PIQUETEROS: THE KIRCHNERS' KEY PROTEST ARM Classified By: CDA Tom Kelly for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

1. (SBU) Summary/Introduction: After being largely co-opted by the government of former President Nestor Kirchner (NK), some Argentine social mid-term congressional elections is not yet clear. It may be that the government has given them enough to sustain their support but not enough to gain their active mobilization. This cable analyzes the history of the piqueteros and their association with the Kirchner governments; a subsequent report will profile key leaders and examine particular groups' roles and positions on key issues. 2. (SBU) As part of the Embassy's ongoing effort to understand the concerns and demands of Argentina's large under-class and has also played a role in amplifying the political power of the Kirchners, in part through marches, roadblocks, and boycotts. Many Argentines also view the GOA's acquiescence in the piqueteros' sometimes illegal tactics, particular roadblocks, as fostering a culture of lawlessness and intimidation. End Summary/Introduction.

Who are the Piqueteros? ----- 3. (SBU) Argentina has, for over a decade, experienced organized protests and activism by social programs. According to 2007 national government statistics, the family aid plan reached 504,784 families, which includes 1,766,744 children. Local piquetero leaders believe the actual number of recipients has dropped as Argentina's economy began to recuperate from its 2001 economic crisis. They estimate that only 800,000 Argentines are benefiting from these programs, while there are no government statistics on recipients after 2007. 4. (SBU) Piquetero organizations gained greater control over their funding during former President Fernando de la Rúa disbursed from the federal government through local city governments to beneficiaries. However, under De la Rúa, 10% of the benefit plans were distributed directly through the piquetero associations once they registered their organizations. According to local academics, De la Rúa was trying to limit piquetero power by

5. (SBU) Today, there are some 60 different piquetero organizations in Argentina, with the majority registered in the poorer suburbs of Buenos Aires. These include the Integrated Movement of Retired and Unemployed Persons (MIJD) with 60,000 members; the Standing Neighborhoods (Barrios de Pie) with 60,000 members; and the Worker Pole with 25,000 members. MTD Evita is smaller than the other groups, but their leader Emilio Persico, a strident supporter of the Kirchners and former Buenos Aires provincial official under former Governor Felipe Sola's administration, -gfv is often able to mobilize some 2,000 people for pro-government protests. Many of these groups were initially allied (and some still are) with pro-Kirchner groups, while still leftist and virulently anti-American, have shown more flexibility. Most groups, regardless of their relations with the government, have shown more flexibility. Most groups, regardless of their relations with the government, have shown more flexibility. Most groups, regardless of their relations with the government, have shown more flexibility. What are their Goals? ----- 6. (SBU) Many piquetero leaders approach key officials in government with one clear goal on June 28, are particularly favorable to piqueteros as the government tries to keep conflict low while securing as many votes as possible. Piqueteros and the Kirchners -----

7. (SBU) Former President Nestor Kirchner (NK) saw in the piquetero movement a potential to strengthen support for his administration among the lower-class voting base. He won the allegiance of some piquetero groups by not suppressing their protests and including over 50 leaders in national and local government. NK's treatment contrasted sharply with the police action against their protests during former Presidents Fernando De la Rúa (1999-2001) and Carlos Menem (1995-1999). 8. (SBU) Although the piqueteros have gained greater official recognition from the national government since the Kirchners took office, they have not been fully integrated into the government's list of candidates for the mid-term election. Origins of the Movement ----- 9. (SBU) The movement dates back to the 1990s when the country experienced historically high levels of unemployment (18% in Buenos Aires province to a total of 7269 protests by 2005, according to local researchers. 10. (SBU) While the movement gained its name from unemployed workers was implemented in the early 1990s. Former President Carlos Menem implemented the first workfare plan in 1993 in response to increased unemployment generated by his privatization policies. In 2002, President Eduardo Duhalde, responding to 33 percent unemployment, created, "Plan for Unemployed Heads of Household," (PJJDH) which aimed to reach all unemployed heads of households, with some two million Argentines receiving benefits by 2003, according to local social movement historians. NK converted the PJJDH plans into three separate plans: a family aid plan, a food security plan, and a local socio-economic development plan. 11. (C) Comment: Argentines are

mid-terms, the ruling Victory Front seems less inclined to mobilize them (which explains NK's recent tiff with D'Elia). The number one issue is